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ABSTRACT

Faculty meetings are frequently attended by school consultants and, in all probability, are utilized for diagnostic, training, and evaluation purposes. In order to formalize what many psychologists may already be doing, this paper considers the means for analyzing faculty meetings to further (1) consultation activity; (2) consultation training; and (3) consultation evaluation. The social psychological approach described here could be applied to staff meetings at institutions other than schools. (Author)

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Training and Conducting Research in Consultation: Can They Be Done Simultaneously?

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Abstract

Faculty meetings are frequently attended by school consultants and, in all probability, are utilized for diagnostic, training, and evaluation purposes. In order to formalize what many psychologists may be doing presently, what follows is a consideration of the means for analyzing faculty meetings to further (a) consultation activity, (b) consultation training, and (c) consultation evaluation. The social psychological approach described here could be applied to staff meetings at institutions other than schools.

Training and Conducting Research in Consultation:

Can They Be Done Simultaneously?

Training and research can be done simultaneously. In our two-semester field-based school consultation course training and research are combined. Activity logs have been analyzed, consultation sessions have been tape recorded and video-taped, and consultees have completed numerous attitudinal and personality measures in order to throw light on such issues as selection of consultees, perceptions of success in consultation, and matching of consultees and consultants. The data have been collected by students in the consultation training course, students after they have completed the course, and the course instructor. The data collection will continue despite the problems resulting from the simultaneous conduction of training and research. There are problems, for example, resulting from the effects of the time burden on the client system, the distrust of the consultant's motivation by the client system, and the interference of the consultant's evaluation anxiety with the consultation activity.

In addition to formal data collection, less formal research is done in our field-based school consultation course. The less formal research method enables an evaluation of consultation activity and

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involves a comparison of faculty meetings within one school over a given time period. Rather than burdening consultants or consultees, a social psychological analysis of faculty meetings appears to further consultation activity and training. Specifically, a consideration of school faculty meetings furthers consultation activity in that an analysis of one meeting can result in greater understanding of that school and has implications for consultative work in it. A consideration of school faculty meetings furthers consultation training in that an analysis of meetings across schools can result in greater understanding of characteristics which are common across schools and specific to a given school.

Faculty meetings are frequently attended by school consultants and, in all probability, are utilized for diagnostic, training, and evaluation purposes. In order to formalize what many school psychologists may be doing presently, what follows is a consideration of the means for analyzing faculty meetings to further (a) consultation activity, (b) consultation training, and (c) consultation evaluation.

Consultation Activity

Generally, the school faculty meeting is one of the few times the entire staff is together. Over the last three years, my students and I have attended numerous faculty meetings early in the year for purposes of our learning about the school and school staff learning about us and the way we work in schools. In general, we have found an analysis of school faculty meetings has implications for consultation activity in that it furthers understanding of the school culture and has implications for consultation work. To illustrate the potential of analyzing staff meetings for purposes of facilitating consultation activity, a first

visit to a faculty meeting in an inner-city Catholic elementary school will be described briefly and, following the example, implications for consultation activity will be discussed. As the example will indicate, guiding our observations were two assumptions: (a) that information about such organizational variables as participation in decision making, status hierarchy, and patterns of communication among staff would have implications for working in schools and (2) that such information could be derived from an analysis of spatial relations, process, and content. Some support for these assumptions can be found in Hornstein, Bunker, Burke, Gindes, & Lewicki (1971).

Example: Analysis of One Faculty Meeting

The staff meeting convened at the convent rather than the nearby school. On arrival we were asked to wait in the convent living room until the principal had completed the business aspect of the meeting. Apparently we were not welcome to the faculty meeting, although we thought we had carefully explained our dual purpose for attendance. When we expressed our interest in the meeting and reiterated our dual purpose, to learn about the school and to communicate our approach, we were allowed to enter. At the meeting, the principal was seated at a desk in the front of the room. The teachers were seated around two oblong tables. Although religious and lay teachers were seated at each of the two oblong tables, the tables were composed of dyads of religious teachers seated next to dyads of lay teachers. I was placed at the principal's table, and the student consultants were placed in the back of the room, behind rather than around the tables with teachers. What is striking about the seating arrangement was the separation between (a) teachers

and student consultants, (b) line and staff, and (c) religious and lay teachers. The spatial relations provide hunches regarding participation in decision making, status hierarchy, and patterns of communication among staff. Specifically, at this point, it could be hypothesized that in this school decision making is nonparticipatory, formal status is recognized, and communication is more frequent among those of like religious status. Also, hypotheses about the classroom could be derived if it were assumed that there was some relationship between (a) the interaction of principal and teachers and (b) the interaction of teacher and pupils.

Our observation of process and content during the meeting confirmed some of these hunches. For example, regarding participation in decision making, the principal made numerous and unilateral decisions during the meeting. At no time did she ask teachers to participate in decision making. Regarding status hierarchy, our observation of process during the meeting supports that information flowed from authority and that there was strong acknowledgement of the principal, the person higher on the organizational chart. One teacher, for example, raised her hand to state that she found an article that would interest staff. She raised her hand to tell of her finding, not of the content of her finding. She then gave the principal the article to read to staff.

The hypothesis regarding patterns of communication among staff is supported by a consideration of process. For example, informal conversations occurred within religious and within lay groups, but not across these groups. In addition, the principal seemed to encourage communication within and discourage communication across religious-lay groups by

purchasing, as she noted, two subscriptions to one religious-educational journal, one for religious and one for lay teachers. That two subscriptions of the same journal were bought for this relatively impoverished school seems significant. Using this as one of several examples illustrates that there were two subgroups of teachers, that the two subgroups seemed to be treated equally, and that this subgrouping seemed to be encouraged by the principal.

Lastly, an analysis of the content of the meeting provided an additional hypothesis, that school staff had little understanding of dynamics underlying pupil behavior and that school staff experienced frustration around their ability to influence pupils. Words such as "selfish," "bold," "stupid," and "lazy" were used to describe the children who bought pizza rather than donated to charity, who disturbed the order in the classroom, who were not learning, and who were not attending school.

Implications

While the faculty meeting furthered our understanding of the school culture, it also raised some issues related to whether, as well as how, we would work in the school. Some of these pre-entry issues raised by the analysis are listed below.

1. That the staff related in an authoritarian way had implications for whether we could work in the school. The question was, could people who relate to authority and to each other in such different ways work together?

2. That the school staff and consultants had different and possibly conflicting goals had implications for whether we could work in the school. The question was, could the school staff and consultants agree on consultative goals?

3. That teachers explained behavior in nonpsychological terms had implications for the establishment of consultation goals. The question was, did school staff want assistance in understanding and utilizing information about pupil behavior?

4. That lay and religious teachers did not appear to communicate had implications for the establishment of consultation goals. It was hypothesized that this lack of communication had negative effects on school and classroom life. The question was, would school staff recognize communication as a problem around which they wanted assistance?

5. That the principal's position was not questioned had implications for how we would work in the school. The question was, would teachers in this school view a "sanctioned by the principal" service as optional? If we were to work in the school, reaffirmation of the voluntariness of teachers' participation was indicated.

In sum, consultation research does not provide clear answers to these questions, as the reviews of Mannino (1973) and Mannino and Shore (1970) indicate. Certainly different consultants with different orientations would approach these issues differently. The point here is that the analysis of the faculty meetings generated initial discussion among the consultants and between the consultants and the school staff. The analysis, as well as the discussions generated by the analysis furthered understanding of the school culture and had implications for consultation activity.

Consultation Training

An analysis of faculty meetings in different schools furthers consultation training in that in enables a greater understanding of

similarities and differences across schools. To illustrate the potential of analyzing staff meetings for purposes of facilitating consultation training, a first visit to a faculty meeting will be contrasted with the faculty meeting discussed above, and the implications for consultation training will be derived.

The two schools to be considered are similar on several demographic variables. Both are inner-city Catholic elementary schools which are located approximately one-half mile from each other. Both are housed in similarly deteriorated buildings. Both serve grades K-8, and a predominantly Spanish-speaking lower- to lower-middle class population. In addition, in both schools the principal is a nun. Given the similarities, and although the schools differ in per cent of lay teachers (50% versus 80%), the expectation was that the schools would be similar with respect to organizational structure, problems presented, and response to consultation. The schools, however, proved dissimilar on several dimensions. The nicknames which we gave the schools indicate some of these differences. In the example presented above, the school was nicknamed "St. Autocracy," and the second school was nicknamed "St. Democracy."

Below, spatial relations, process, and content of the two faculty meetings in the schools will be briefly considered and differences between the schools on such organizational variables as participation in decision making, status hierarchy, and patterns of communication will be indicated. The purpose here is to present the schools in descriptive rather than evaluative terms. Clearly, there is literature on the effects of status hierarchy and various types of decision making structures and communication channels on worker productivity and worker satisfaction

(for example, see Hornstein, et al., 1971; Walberg, 1974). However, rather than making a case for autocracy or democracy, our focus is on understanding the complexity of the school culture.

Example: Comparison of Faculty Meetings Between Schools

In "St. Democracy" we felt welcome for the entire meeting, and were encouraged to sit wherever we pleased, around one large square table. The principal was seated at the table with the teachers, and religious and lay teachers seemed to be mixed at the table. While the seating arrangement in "St. Autocracy" indicated separation between (a) teachers and consultants, (b) line and staff, and (c) religious and lay teachers, the seating pattern here indicated unity between the groups. Further, from the seating pattern at "St. Democracy" it was hypothesized that decision making is participatory, formal status may not be recognized, and communication occurs between religious and lay teachers and between principal and teachers.

Our observation of process and content during the meeting confirmed some of these hunches. For example, the hypothesis regarding participation in decision making was partially confirmed. The principal raised issues, encouraged discussion, and seemed to make decisions based on majority opinion around most issues. However, she refused discussion and unilaterally made decisions around issues concerning parental demands. Regarding status hierarchy, our observation of process during the meeting supports that power and influence were more equalized between principal and teachers at "St. Democracy." In addition, the questions following our introduction about how we work in schools

indicate a difference between the two schools. One token question was asked at "St. Autocracy." In contrast, at "St. Democracy" the questions indicated a more vigorous and involved faculty who was less accepting of what the principal sanctioned.

Lastly, the hypothesis regarding patterns of communication were supported by a consideration of process. The consideration of status hierarchy above indicates that there was two-way communication, and communication occurred across religious-lay lines. In addition, the principal seemed to encourage communication, as evidenced by her suggesting dividing consultants and teachers into small, mixed groups for purposes of discussion.

An analysis of the content of the meeting also provided an hypothesis about school staff's understanding of dynamics underlying pupil behavior. While such an analysis with "St. Autocracy" staff meeting indicated vigorous noninvolvement with psychology, here a grasp of some psychological principles was indicated.

Implications

Given the difference between the schools, our approach in each school would need to differ. While consultants may not all agree regarding what these differences should be, the point is that an analysis of faculty meetings enabled a consideration of differences across schools.

What an analysis of faculty meeting indicates is that in addition to similar roles and furniture, and as the present example indicates, similarity in religious orientation, physical structure of building and population served, each school has its own personality. What the personality

is, and what enables school personalities to develop are important questions for school consultants to consider.

In addition to learning about schools, the analysis of faculty meetings indicates a process of learning about schools. Specifically, learning about how and what to observe, to listen to, and to interpret may result from a study of faculty meetings. In sum, in many ways the faculty meeting could be for the school what a projective technique is for the individual. The analysis of faculty meetings may enable understanding of a school's character structure, and may further skills in observing, listening, developing interpretations, and deriving implications for "treatment." Further, the analysis of school faculty meetings may result in an appreciation of the complexity of schools and of the differences and smiliarities across schools.

Consultation Evaluation

A comparison of faculty meetings within one school over a given time period enables a consideration of the efficacy of consultation. To illustrate the potential of analyzing staff meetings for purposes of consultation evaluation, two faculty meetings over a one year time period will be compared and implications discussed.

Specifically, "St. Autocracy's" faculty meeting will be contrasted with that school's faculty meeting following one year of consultation. Thus, the first faculty meeting which was attended by the consultants at the beginning of each of two years will be compared. Three different consultation trainees attended the two meetings, and at the time they attended the meeting they were new to the school.

The means of establishing consultative goals are irrelevant for purposes of this paper. A statement of goals, however, is relevant. The general consultation goals were: (a) to further school staff understanding of child behavior, (b) to further school staff's sensitive response to child behavior, (c) to further communication among teachers, and (d) to further communication between teachers and principal. In general, the interventions were varied. There was individual and group consultee-centered case consultation, and consultee-centered administrative consultation. In this school, which houses approximately 230 children and nine teachers, consultative services were provided by three trainees, each consulting in the school for one-half day a year.

Example: Comparison of Faculty Meetings Within One School

In contrast to the first year, the staff meeting the second year did not begin until we arrived. At this latter meeting, there were three tables arranged in a horseshoe. No noticeable pattern among lay and religious teachers existed, and all teachers appeared to chat amiably with each other and with us before the meeting began. We felt welcome.

The principal sat on the end seat at the head table of the horseshoe, and the professor-consultant was reserved the seat next to her. The student consultants were asked to sit next to the university trainer, and other guests were placed next to them. In contrast to the first year, the seating arrangement appeared less conducive to "autocratic rule." Further, it did not indicate separation between religious and lay teachers. The seating of student consultants at, rather than behind the tables was interpreted as greater acceptance of new consultants. In

addition, the inviting of hospital consultants for provision of medical services indicated greater receptivity to outsiders. Thus, change in spatial relations supported that there was a change over the year with respect to two goals, that of furthering communication among teachers and between teachers and principal. Although the changes were consistent with the goals, it was not clear that our efforts had resulted in this change.

Our observation of process and content also indicated movement toward the goals. The active questioning and discussion by most teachers and, in contrast to the previous year, the relatively small amount of principal talk was striking. In addition, the principal seemed to encourage and listen to discussion among teachers. Clearly, two-way communication had increased among teachers and between teachers and principal over the year.

The consideration of the content indicated staff's greater understanding of and ability to sensitively respond to child's behavior. To assist the new consultants, one of the teachers suggested that school staff discuss some of the children around which they needed consultative help. Teachers then presented cases, and their presentations indicated a new vocabulary as well as a new way of conceptualizing problems. For example, words such as "selfish," "bold," "stupid," and "lazy" were replaced by "perceptual difficulty," "learning disabled," and "emotionally needy." However, whether this new vocabulary and means of conceptualization resulted in more sensitive interactions with children was not clear

from this meeting.

Implications

The analysis of the two faculty meetings over time did not clearly indicate that change had occurred. The consultees may simply have been doing what they knew we were concerned about. Our subsequent work in the school, however, supported the change. If we accept that change did occur, the second issue concerns whether the observed change was a function of our consultative efforts. A cause-effect relationship is not clear from the evaluation. However, the school change was consistent with our consultation goals. Further, if we accept that change did occur and was a function of our intervention, our analysis throws little light on what consultative activity had the desired effects. A consideration of the process of consultation and exit interviews with consultees can further this understanding.

The point is that some type of evaluation of consultation activity should be done, and can be done without administering tests and questionnaires and placing additional burdens on school staff and consultant trainees. The analysis of faculty meetings can provide consultants with feedback and, as in this case, with positive reinforcement. In addition, it can further training and consultation work.

Conclusions

In sum, informal as well as formal research approaches are needed in this early stage of consultation research. The latter is difficult to do since it usually places additional burdens on consultant, consultees, and clients. The former places fewer burdens on all and, as the present

example indicates, can have immediate as well as positive effects on consultation activity and training. Further, data derived from the informal research methods, such as the analysis of faculty meetings, may enable the development of more sophisticated hypotheses.

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